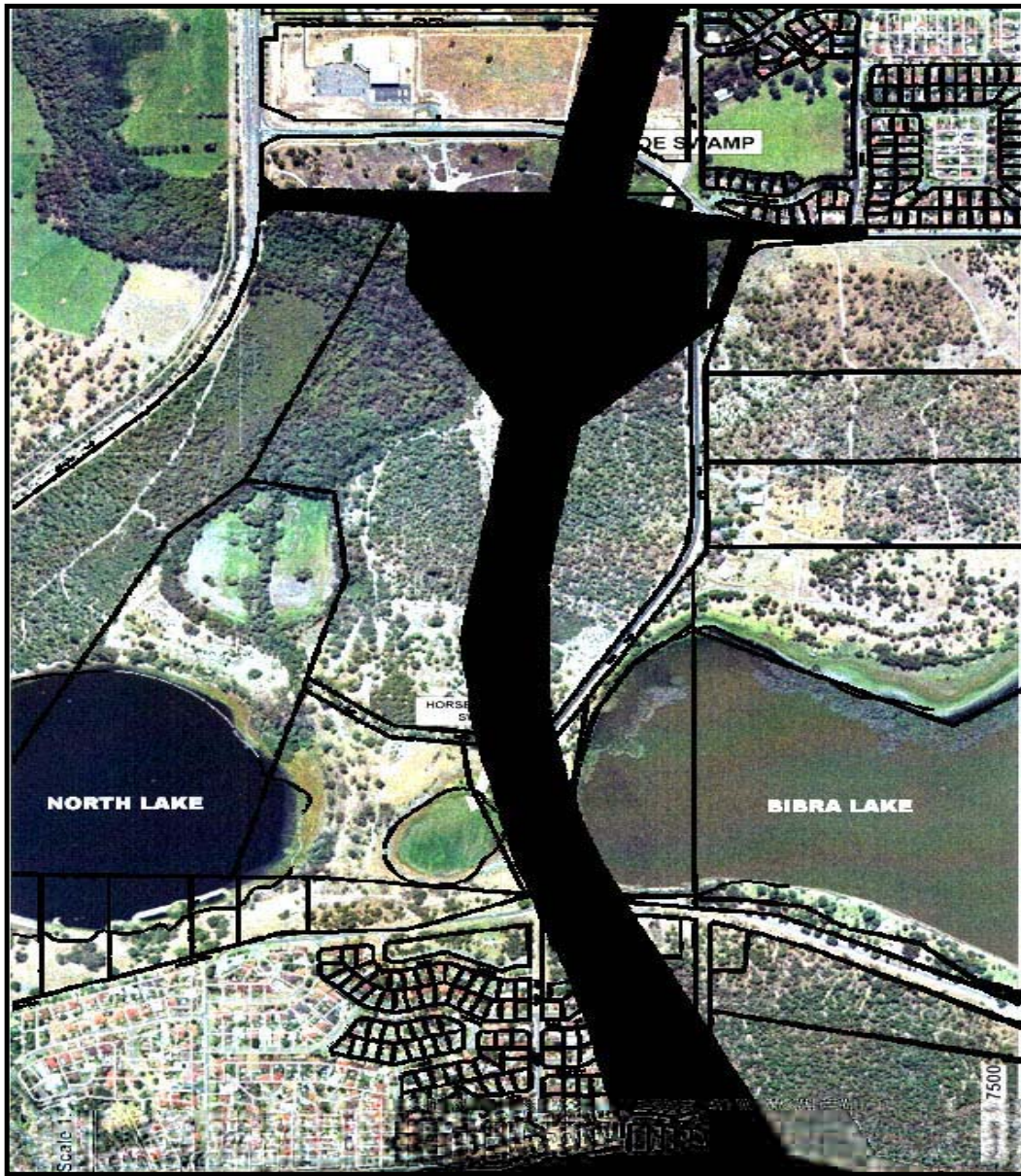


The Case for the Deletion of the Proposed Roe Highway Stage 8 Reservation through the  
Beeliar Regional Park  
North Lake and Bibra Lake

**A Community Report**



Current Proposed Roe Highway Stage 8 through North Lake & Bibra Lake

**BEELIAR CONSERVATION & HERITAGE COUNCIL**

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## Foreword

This discussion paper was produced for all the community organisations and individuals concerned about our environment especially the important wetland areas in the Beeliam Regional Park. Its purpose is to outline studies, reports, government consultations and statements by relevant organisations and individuals on the importance of the Beeliam Wetlands, specifically the area under threat from the proposed Roe Highway Stage 8.

It is hoped that this discussion paper will promote the protection of all the Beeliam Wetlands and help in the removal of the highway reservation through this important wetland area. The paper will show there is no doubt the Beeliam Wetlands are significant in ecological and social terms and deserve immediate and the highest form of protection.

The current ALP Government has articulated the need to protect the Beeliam Wetlands from the threats posed by the proposed Roe Highway Stage 8. However, despite having the ability to immediately amend the Metropolitan Region Scheme to delete the Roe Highway reservation and remove the threat to these important Wetlands the State government has not done so.

Once again the volatile nature of the oil price and vulnerability of the oil supply are constantly in the media. It should give people cause to reflect on the type of transport system relevant for the future in addition to the urgent need to protect remnant wetland ecosystems in the Perth Metropolitan Region.

**Mark Hingston** (B.Sc, Grad. Dip. Ed Studies)  
28 September 2005

## Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the people who have contributed to producing this report and for their continual support and active role in bringing information to the community.

Particular thanks to Mark Hingston for his tireless work in producing this report and careful gathering of factual documentation and data, to Joe Branco for the executive summary and Professor Phillip Jennings for writing the conclusion of this report.

On behalf of the Beeliar Conservation & Heritage Council, I would like to thank the community who have supported us and who have taken it upon themselves to fight for the preservation and protection of the Beeliar Regional Park and North and Bibra Lakes.

***“It’s a gathering place, a cross-over point for the moon and sun and a place where traditional ceremonies have always taken place. It’s like looking at a jigsaw – you take a piece out and you can’t see the picture”***

**Antoinne Forrest-Yarran**

*(Fremantle Rooster, Feb 25, 2005)*

Dr Felicity McGeorge  
Beeliar Conservation & Heritage Council  
Chairperson

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## Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to summarise the studies, reports, government consultations and statements by relevant organisations and individuals on the importance of the Beeliar Wetlands under threat from the proposed Roe Highway Stage 8. (see *Aerial Map 1*, p. 6)

Roe Highway was first proposed in the late 1950s as part of the Stephenson-Hepburn Plan, to be a ring road around the main population areas of Perth and to provide connections between the port of Fremantle, the proposed industrial area to the south of Fremantle and Welshpool. The Roe Highway reserve was established in the Metropolitan Region Scheme in 1963 allowing for a 6-lane divided highway.

Stages 1-7 have been constructed, terminating at Kwinana Freeway. Stage 6 generated considerable controversy because of impacts on the highly significant Brixton Street wetlands, and Stage 7 generated even more concern because of proximity to residential areas and impact on significant bushland and declared rare flora in Ken Hurst Park.

There is a strong environmental case to delete Stage 8 because it would destroy some of the highly significant Beeliar wetlands. It is now recognised that these wetlands have the following important values:

- outstanding biodiversity;
- habitat for wildlife, including migratory waders;
- Aboriginal cultural and spiritual sites; and
- Important recreational areas.

There is now also a strong planning case for terminating Roe Highway at Kwinana Freeway, avoiding the need to construct the remaining sections of Roe Highway. Most of the planning reasons proposed in the 1950s and 1960s in support of Roe Highway are no longer relevant as the industrial areas originally proposed in South Fremantle have either not eventuated or have been relocated. Further, with the deletion of the Fremantle Eastern Bypass, originally proposed as an extension to Stirling Highway to cut through White Gum Valley, the remaining sections of Roe Highway simply have nowhere to go. Finally, the State Government organised the 2001 Freight Network Review Congress, which reaffirmed the importance of North Lake and Bibra Lake and identified credible alternative freight options for Perth that do not require the construction of Stage 8.

There now appears to be little, if any, political, community or government agency support for Roe Highway Stage 8, as evidenced by the following:

- In the 1990s the then Department of Planning and Urban Development found that the preferable option for Roe Highway Stage 8, on natural environmental, ethnological and archaeological grounds, was the No Highway Option;
- During the 2001 State election campaign community organizations organised a highly successful rally to highlight the threats posed by the proposed Roe Highway Stage 8 to the Beeliar Wetlands, indicating strong community opposition to the proposal;
- The State Government-sponsored 2001 Freight Network Review and Congress supported the deletion of the Roe Highway Stage 8 reservation after a rigorous triple bottom line analysis;

- North and Bibra Lakes have been placed on the Register of the National Estate of the Australian Government Heritage Commission because of their environmental significance;
- The National Trust of Australia (WA) assessed the Beelias wetland ecosystem as being highly significant;
- The National Trust of Australia (WA) also recommended the deletion of the Roe Highway Reserve and the incorporation of it into the North and Bibra Lake A Class Reserve;
- The Metropolitan Commission of Aboriginal Elders wrote to Minister MacTiernan recommending that Stage 8 not proceed because of concerns over the impacts on the Beelias Wetlands, which are of traditional importance to Aborigines;
- In 2002 the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, Alannah MacTiernan, told the Cockburn City Herald that, "There is now a commitment to eliminate the Fremantle eastern bypass and Roe eight";
- The EPA advised the Government in 2003 that any proposal to construct Roe Highway Stage 8 through the Beelias Wetlands would be extremely difficult to be made environmentally acceptable;
- In response to the EPA advice, the Environment and Heritage Minister Dr Judy Edwards noted that, "The report has confirmed the State Government's view that any road bisecting Bibra and North Lakes should not be built";
- In response to the EPA advice, the Planning and Infrastructure Minister, Alannah MacTiernan, noted that, "This advice ... only confirms what we have been saying all along, that no government was ever going to be able to build Roe Highway Stage 8 through the wetlands", and
- In 2004, in response to a question in Parliament from Hon Jim Scott, the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development representing the Minister for the Environment replied, "The Government has announced its position that it will not be constructing Roe Highway Stage 8 but has not made a decision regarding the future of the road reserve in the vicinity of Bibra Lake".

At every step of the way the arguments against the construction of Roe Highway Stage 8 have been supported by numerous studies and subsequent government reviews and technical reports. This entire process has withstood public and government scrutiny and proven to be robust.

In summary, Roe Highway Stage 8 is redundant. The EPA concluded that any alignment (current or Hope Road, *see Aerial Maps 1 & 2*) would have significant negative environmental and ecological impacts on the Beelias Wetlands. There is little community support for it; any planning reasons for its construction no longer exist; credible alternative freight options for Perth that do not require the construction of Stage 8 exist. Traditional owners do not support it; various Government departments and authorities have concerns; and the current State Government has continued to state publicly that it will not build Stage 8. All that needs to be done now is to delete the Road Reserve and find uses for the land that better reflect community needs and aspirations.

Joe Branco  
North Lake Residents Association Inc.  
Convenor

## Background to Roe Highway

The concept for Roe Highway was developed in the late 1950s as part of the Stephenson-Hepburn Metropolitan Region Plan. While the Stephenson-Hepburn urban land use vision has been well and truly altered in the intervening 50 years the highway plans, which formed part of it, have remained and been expanded. The Roe Highway reserve was established in the Metropolitan Region Scheme (MRS) in 1963 with reserve alignments between 80-110 metres. This permitted a 6-lane divided highway with a nominal capacity of 92 000 vehicles per day. (1)

There was little organised opposition to the construction of the earlier stages of Roe Highway due to a clearly defined reserve thereby avoiding loss of homes and urban connectivity. Conservationists were also unable to carry out a sustained campaign on the environmental issues, which were primarily impacts on wetlands and river crossings which early highway stages intersected and ran through. However, opposition has increased to the construction of later stages especially 7 and 8 highlighting the encroachment of the highway into areas of high environmental significance, a more articulate and politically aware community and general concern about the social and economic impacts of expanding highway systems in the established urban environment. It must be noted that the western section of Roe Highway Stage 8 was imposed over an existing urban area, part of Hamilton Hill, and in particular the Roe Highway extension which was to cut through South and central Fremantle to the Fremantle Port. What could have been called Roe Highway Stage 9, a former section running from Clontarf Hill in Hamilton Hill through South Fremantle and along Marine Terrace to the Fremantle Port, was deleted from the MRS in 1991.

Precedence has been established for the deletion of poorly planned highway reservations placed over established urban areas. No political party has indicated a willingness to re-establish the old Roe Highway Stage 9 reservation. Other examples where changing community priorities resulted in the deletion of major highway reservations include; the Swan River Drive, the Perth Inner Ring Road and of course the Fremantle Bypass. Moreover, the recent deletion of a section of the Fremantle-Rockingham Controlled Access Highway through the Beeliar Regional Park in Henderson, is based on ecological considerations.

As part of a former Labor Government's 1990 review of highway proposals in the southern suburbs, the Roe Highway Stage 8 alignment through the Beeliar Wetlands was subject to assessment along with alternative routes and a 'no highway' option (1). Further to this, the then Minister for Planning requested the Department of Planning and Urban Development to initiate immediate action to delete the Fremantle Eastern Bypass and Roe Highway west of Stock Road from the MRS. In its conclusions to the review of the Roe Highway Stage 8 alignment through the Beeliar Wetlands the Department of Planning and Urban Development found that the preferable option, on natural environmental, ethnological and archaeological grounds, was the No Highway Option.

During the 2001 State election campaign community organizations, including the North Lakes Residents Association, organised a rally to highlight the threats posed by the proposed Roe Highway Stage 8 to the Beeliar Wetlands. The strong turn-out and support that the rally attracted gave a clear indication of the level of public support for the protection and conservation of the Beeliar Wetland system.

To its credit the incoming Labor Government in 2001 organised the Freight Network Review Congress to review, among other things, the Roe Highway Stage 7 and 8 alignments. One of the outcomes of the Congress was that Stage 7 was to proceed along the original alignment. This was despite a number of viable alternatives routes which would have avoided identified environmental and social concerns.

Concerns about Roe Highway Stage 7 primarily focused on the loss of a significant area of urban bushland which had remained in the long term highway reservation, the destruction of a major proportion of a colony of the rare Grand Spider Orchid and impacts on other flora and fauna. Other major concerns were that the construction of Stage 7 along the current alignment would establish the conditions to extend Stage 8 through the Beeliar Wetlands and transport issues such as new highways inducing or generating greater levels of traffic, the associated impacts on air quality and placing more reliance on oil based transport systems.

Of particular importance was the Congress' support, after a rigorous triple bottom line analysis, for the deletion of the Roe Highway Stage 8 reservation. The following discussion outlines some of the accumulated studies and statements from Labor Government members supporting the deletion of the Roe Highway Stage 8 reservation.

## **2. 2001 Election Rally for the Beeliar Wetlands**

During the 2001 State Election Campaign the North Lake Residents Association and the Beeliar Conservation and Heritage Council organised a rally to show support for the protection of the wetland ecosystem. Over 1500 people attended the rally. Candidates from most political parties attended and each represented party was permitted to have a speaker address the rally. The Greens' and Democrats' candidates were unambiguous and supported the deletion of the Roe Highway reserve through the wetlands. A State ALP candidate, Fran Logan, opposed building the highway through the wetlands. The Liberal Party representative, MLC Simon O'Brien, was left to defend the Liberal Government's position to build the proposed highway through the wetland.

However, after the rally Simon O'Brien made an interesting statement to the media suggesting that he could not support a highway through the wetlands due to environmental factors. Perhaps he had been made aware of his Government's 1997 *Wetlands Conservation Policy for Western Australia*. The policy states on page 3 that, "Wetlands form a vital living part of our environment. It is essential that they be conserved and wisely managed."

Further to this, the first objective of the Coalition Government's 1997 Wetlands Conservation Policy is, "To prevent the further loss or degradation of valuable wetlands and wetland types, and to promote wetland conservation, creation and restoration. "

This Policy followed in the footsteps of a number of government wetland protection policies. A relevant EPA wetland strategy (2), produced soon after the Liberal Government formed in 1993 stated that, "The Environmental Protection Authority considers that an adequate and representative system of reserves should be set aside for the conservation of flora, fauna and landscape. Such reserves should be properly managed and given security commensurate with their conservation value. The integrity

of such reserves should be maintained. Activities that damage the conservation values of reserves should be prohibited - regardless of whether the activities are in or outside reserves. “

### **3. National Trust Assessment of the Beelias Wetlands**

That the Beelias Wetlands fall within the ambit of the 1997 *Wetlands Conservation Policy for Western Australia* definition of 'valuable wetlands' there can be little doubt. The National Trust of Australia (WA) assessment of the wetland ecosystem (3) outlines in detail the significance of the Beelias Wetland ecosystem.

Within the Statement of Significance are numerous examples of the importance of the area. For example,

#### Aboriginal Context

- The area is of great historic and ongoing cultural significance to the Nyungar community.
- It is the most significant Aboriginal historic site, within the Perth metropolitan area, south of the river.
- It is registered with the WA Museum as a mythological site.

#### Recreation

- Currently the general public of Perth, especially those from south of the Swan River, use the area for recreation, leisure and aesthetic appreciation.
- It has a growing significance in education activities at all levels.

#### Ecosystem

- Roe Swamp is a large, complex sumpland with a wide variety of microenvironments. It is the only sumpland (of 4 in the area) which is intact hydrologically and vegetationally. (It must be noted here that the current Roe Highway Stage 8 alignment runs through the middle of Roe Swamp).
- The area supports a rich diversity of vertebrates which are totally dependent on the ongoing integrity of the wetlands and dry uplands.
- This area has one of the richest, floristically diverse, plant assemblages within the Perth metropolitan area. The plant communities around each of its waterbodies differ and as such have a significant synergistic effect on the entire environment.
- North Lake with permanent open water and an extensive series of seasonal wetlands including Roe Swamp draining into it.

#### Current Biological Significance

- It has a high degree of ecological integrity, much of the area has had little disturbance especially north east of North Lake including Roe Swamp.
- It has a high degree of ecological diversity. (Flora and fauna)
- It is used by migratory waterbirds such as Greenshanks, Dotterels, Plovers and Sandpipers which are protected by International Governmental Agreements (JAMBA, CAMBA).
- It has been placed on the Register of the National Estate of the Australian Government Heritage Commission because of its environmental significance.

#### Future Potential

- An area of importance for environmental education.
- An area of excellent biodiversity and hence of significance to visitors
- An area of tranquillity of great social psychological significance.

The National Trust finally makes a number of recommendations for the area, two of which have particular relevance in this discussion.

- Incorporate the current MRWA Roe Highway Road Reserve into the North/Bibra Lake A Class CALM Reserve
- Close the eastern portion of Hope Road thus leaving a single access road to the Cockburn City Wetlands Education Centre. This would allow a return of the natural hydrological flows into Roe Swamp thus increasing the longevity and viability of this important sumpland.

#### **4. Beelias Regional Park Management Plan**

The *Beelias Regional Park, Proposed Final Management Plan 2005-2014 (4)*, provides additional information on the importance of the Beelias Wetlands. It endorses their high conservation values, the significant remnant vegetation communities, the important nesting and feeding habitats (especially for JAMBA & CAMBA protected birds), its recreational and educational importance and notes that the entire park is listed on the Register of the National Estate.

The overall strategy for the Regional Park in the management plan is to, “ Manage the Park for biodiversity conservation, and allow recreation and other uses of the Park to occur to the extent that they do not adversely impact on the other values of the Park.” (page 5). Interestingly, the City of Melville, an advocate of Roe Highway Stage 8, approved this management plan.

Page 36 of the Management Plan notes that the proposed Roe Highway (Stage 8) would have significant impacts upon the linkages between North and Bibra Lakes.

It is also important to note that Beelias Regional Park is used by people throughout the Metropolitan Region. An idea of the user catchment was provided in a SHAWMAC (5) survey of the Bibra Lake area in January 2002. The survey revealed that the Park is used by people from Koondoola in the northern suburbs to Port Kennedy in the south.

#### **5. Freight Network Congress**

The Freight Network Congress held in November 2001 applied a triple bottom line analysis to consider what should be done about Roe Highway Stage 8 and about alternatives to the Fremantle Eastern Bypass. The overwhelming outcome of the Congress, in relation to Roe Highway Stage 8, was that the current alignment through the Beelias Wetlands and the ‘modified’ alignment via Hope Road were not acceptable (6).

In addition to this outcome the Freight Congress of 15 June 2002 considered that the issue of Roe Highway Stage 8 reservation was of 'High Importance'. Under the Freight Network Master Plan contained in the Freight Congress report of 15 June 2002, the Congress resolved that the Roe Highway Stage 8 reservation be deleted from the Metropolitan Region Scheme (7). As will be seen in Section 6, the State Government committed to reflect resolutions of the Freight Network Review by amending the Metropolitan Region Scheme.

In a media release dated 13 August, 2002 titled, "No New Freeways Planned for South of the River", the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure confirmed the Congress' resolution to remove reservations for Roe Highway Stage 8 and the Fremantle Eastern Bypass. As a consequence of this the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure formed the Freight Network Implementation Committee. The Committee's role was to provide continuity to the Metropolitan Network Review and to oversee the implementation of the resulting Freight Network Strategy.

## **6. The Freight Network Review (Multi-Criteria Analysis of Highway Options)**

As part of the Freight Network Review (FNR) the Department for Planning and Infrastructure undertook a Multi-Criteria Analysis (8) of the Roe Highway options developed during the extensive FNR public consultations. The multi-criteria analysis focussed on Roe Highway Stages 7 & 8 and the alternative route options developed for them. A set of criteria for comparing the alternatives and a method for ranking the alternatives, based on how well they satisfied the criteria, were developed. The criteria were extensive, covered many economic, social and environmental issues and as such allowed for both qualitative and quantitative evaluation.

Two workshops were conducted to develop the comparison criteria, carry out the evaluation and sensitivity analysis and the ranking of options. The Freight Network Congress and the Multi-Criteria Analysis turned out to be perhaps one of the most public, comprehensive and extensive analyses given to a road proposal in Western Australia. The findings were that Option A1 (Roe Highway ending at Kwinana Freeway utilising the existing MRS reservation and a Stock Road upgrade) (*see App 1*), ranked the highest or most favourable. Six other route options which either terminated Roe Highway at the Freeway or avoided the Beeliar Wetlands via a highway extension further south also ranked highly. All options that crossed the Beeliar Wetlands ranked very poorly. (*see App 2*)

Responding to community concern over the use of, and designated routes for, long vehicles and road trains, the State Government held a Road Train Summit in September 2001. The consensus conclusions of the Summit were that the primary areas needing improvement were,

- Community participation in decision making
- Decision making that takes into account social, environmental and economic impacts.

Section 6 of the *Road Train Summit Report*, (Integrated Land Use & Transport Planning) (9), noted principles that should underlie government action were,

- Reflection of the changing community views in outcomes
- Consideration of the wider impacts of planning decisions

Also within the Road Train Summit conclusions the Government committed to undertaking a Freight Network Review and within that Review to,

- Reflect agreed major concerns by amending the Metropolitan Region Scheme
- Take account of social, environmental and economic impacts
- Base all decisions on social, environmental and economic impacts

A regular theme begins to emerge from the transport debate when it is opened up and made objective and inclusive. Outdated policies can be reconsidered and a more appropriate and sustainable balance struck. The former process, whereby freight industry representatives, bureaucrats and a Minister or two would decide transport policy or transport routes behind closed doors, is clearly undemocratic and totally inadequate considering the new demands of today and the high level of expertise in the community.

## **7. Metropolitan Region Scheme Amendment Studies Relevant to Roe Highway**

Following the multi-criteria analysis and unanimous findings from the Freight Network Review and Congress to reject Roe Highway Stage 8 and instead support the proposed alternatives, the State Government initiated the deletion of the Fremantle Eastern Bypass from the MRS.

The WA Planning Commission undertook the deletion process and commissioned a series of reports. These examined the comparative impacts of the Fremantle Eastern Bypass and Roe Highway Stage 8 routes and the alternatives proposed by the Freight Network Congress, sometimes referred to as the Stock Road option and subsequently adopted by the State Government.

The four reports commissioned by the WA Planning Commission were collectively titled *Assessment of the Fremantle Eastern Bypass and the Preferred Alternative*. Individual reports covered social, traffic, environmental and economic aspects.

A brief summary of the various reports is given below.

### **ECONOMIC Aspects**

- The revised Stock Road option returns a very high Benefit/Cost Ratio of 5.07 compared to the FEB and Roe Highway Option Benefit/Cost Ratio of only 1.40.
- The revised Stock Road option has a more even spread of benefits with greater travel time savings and vehicle operating cost benefits.
- On the basis of the Benefit/Cost analysis modelling including the underlying assumptions adopted for land there does appear to be a compelling economic justification to support the revised Stock Road option over the FEB and Roe Highway option. (10)

### SOCIAL Aspects

- The FEB and Roe Highway option is likely to result in greater social impacts on heritage, visual amenity, property and community severance.
- It is anticipated that, based on the traffic modelling to date, the FEB and Roe Highway option will have greater noise impacts. (11)

### TRAFFIC Aspects

- The FEB and Roe Highway option results in greater reductions of traffic volumes on some parts of the existing road network than the initial and revised Stock Road options. However, these Stock Road options (with some improvements) are also able to provide acceptable operation of the road network in 2031.
- All options deliver safety benefits, with the FEB and Roe Highway option delivering higher safety benefits than the Stock Road options.
- Leach Highway – Traffic changes between the options are relatively minor along Leach Highway (east of Stock Road) and are not expected to require geometric changes to any other intersections along Leach Highway.
- South Street – It is not expected that changes to the layout of signalised intersections east of Stock Road will be required for any option. (12)

### ENVIRONMENTAL Aspects

- The environmental impacts of the FEB and Roe Stage 8 option are significantly greater than those associated with the revised Stock Road option. (Impacts on flora, fauna, greenway corridors, Bush Forever sites, remnant vegetation, wetlands, hydrology and topography).
- The environmental assessment indicates that the FEB and Roe Highway option will clearly have a higher impact than the revised Stock Road option from an environmental perspective.
- The vulnerability of groundwater to contamination in this (FEB and Roe Highway) option is also higher due to the proposed alignment for Roe Highway Stage 8 which would extend through an area that has a Very High Vulnerability. (13)

## 8. Aboriginal Heritage

During the Freight Network Congress the Department for Planning and Infrastructure commissioned a risk analysis on Aboriginal Heritage values from the proposed options for Roe Highway Stages 7 & 8 (14). These included the current highway reserve alignments and many of the proposed alternative routes developed in the Congress. Specifically, the analysis examined impacts on mythological sites, archaeological sites, loss of Aboriginal trails and on registered Aboriginal sites.

The analysis found that the Roe Highway Stage 8 current alignment proposal, or any other proposed route through the Beelihar Wetlands, rated as the most destructive to Aboriginal Heritage. Alternative options that avoided the Beelihar Wetlands, proposed and considered during the Freight Congress, rated the least destructive.

The Metropolitan Commission of Elders is a peak Aboriginal organisation which views itself as independent of government. The Commission is endorsed by the Western Australian Government and resourced through the Department of Indigenous Affairs (15). The Elders have highlighted their concerns and wishes for the Beelihar Wetland area in a letter (*dated 18 November 2002*) to Alannah MacTiernan MLA (Minister for Planning and

Infrastructure), the Environmental Protection Authority and Main Roads WA. Part of the letter states that:

*“the Elders wish to inform you that the area in the vicinity is extremely fragile and any encroachment on it may result in permanent damage to the wetlands, that has traditional importance to them. Of further concern is the need to protect the cultural significance of the area, and to highlight that any disturbance would result in irreparable damage. After considering the Council’s concerns it is hoped that any extension of the Roe Highway be removed from future consideration and that Farrington Road remain as it is, without widening or extension.”(see App 3)*

## **9. Environmental Protection Authority & the Freight Network Review**

During the Freight Network Review the Environment Minister sought Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) advice (16) regarding impacts on the Beelihar Wetland system if Roe Highway Stage 8 were to be constructed on the current alignment. The EPA noted that the Beelihar Wetland conservation values had been recognised for some time, officially at least since 1983 when it was included in the System Six report as M93 Reserve, and more recently as a part inclusion into Bush Forever/Bush Plan and wetland environment protection policies.

The EPA noted that a significant portion of the Beelihar Wetlands are classified ‘Conservation Category’. Importantly, this includes Roe Swamp and Horse Paddock Swamp, two conservation zones that would be directly and significantly impacted by the Roe Highway proposal. As the dense wetland vegetation and micro-habitats of Roe Swamp play a role in moderating the chemistry of groundwater inputs from the east and form an essential ecological link between nearby lakes and other wetlands, the EPA considered protection of Roe Swamp a high priority.

The EPA further noted that the Roe Highway proposal would also indirectly impact other wetland areas outside the highway alignment by creating a severance in the wetland linkages. The ecological severance would impact on the values and functions of the various wetlands within the area, on the unity of the eastern chain of the Beelihar Wetlands and consequently reduce the ecosystem’s viability and long-term management. The EPA also found that the Roe Highway proposal would detract significantly from the recreational and educational values currently derived from the area. The Roe Highway proposal would also result in the destruction of native vegetation within a Bush Forever site.

As the Roe Highway debate continued and evidence mounted against the highway proposal, the State Liberal Party changed its argument on Roe Highway Stage 8. From stating that the current alignment must be used, the Parliamentary Liberal Party is now suggesting that a Hope Road alignment through the Beelihar Regional Park (*see Aerial Map 2*) should now be pursued as the ‘new’ Roe Highway alignment. This change is an acknowledgement that the current alignment is not environmentally acceptable. However, as can be seen from Aerial Maps 1 and 2, there is little difference between the two alignments. Indeed, this is why the EPA concluded that any proposal to construct Roe Highway Stage 8 within the current alignment, or any alignment through the Beelihar Wetlands, would be extremely difficult to be made environmentally acceptable. (16)

The EPA advice is clear that construction of Roe Highway Stage 8 using any alignment through the Beeliam Regional Park would lead to the ecological values of the area as a whole being diminished in the long-term and that every effort should be made to avoid that.

The EPA recommended that,

- Other alternatives to direct freight through the area be pursued.
- If a decision is made not to proceed with Roe Highway Stage 8, the road reserve be removed from the MRS and the area be reserved as Park and Recreation and incorporated into the Beeliam Regional Park.
- Consideration be given to downgrading the eastern section of Hope Road and rehabilitation of that area to strengthen ecological linkages.

In this case the EPA was being consistent with earlier advice in particular that given to the Department of Planning and Urban Development in 1990 (1). In a letter to the Chairman of the Roe Highway Consultative Committee, at that time reviewing the highway route options through the Beeliam Wetlands, the Director of the EPA Evaluation Division stated that, “ The Authority agreed to advise you that: any new road option through the Beeliam Wetlands would not be environmentally acceptable. “

## **10. State Australian Labor Party (ALP) Election Policies**

The State ALP Planning Policy taken to the 2005 election had no direct reference to the Beeliam Wetlands. However, the ALP Planning Policy did contain something relevant in the Conservation of Natural Areas and Landscapes in the Metropolitan Region section. It notes, “ Labor acknowledges that Perth’s bushlands, the Swan and Canning Rivers, other wetlands and the coastline are important assets that contribute to the quality of life for all Western Australians ” (page127).

The State ALP Conservation and Environment Policy for the 2005 election carries a similar statement in policy No. 102 (page 30). The Conservation and Environment Policy also contains a number of policy statements endorsing protection for wetlands. For example, Policy No.s 91, 104, 136, 149 and 153 all have references to the important functions of wetlands in Western Australia and affirms that conservation, protection and ecologically sustainable management are priorities for them.

The Conservation and Environment Policy notes that Labor would protect these areas by,

- instituting a zoning review to protect landscape and flood-prone areas
- taking all possible measures...to facilitate the participation by the community in the identification, protection and management of all these areas (page 128).

## 11. Statements by Government Ministers and Parliamentary Speeches

The deletion of the Fremantle Eastern Bypass and the Labor Government's stated intention not to build Roe Highway Stage 8 has generated considerable debate and media attention. Most of this was initiated by misinformation from the Parliamentary Opposition and a media keen to highlight conflict. While most media focussed on the Fremantle Eastern Bypass there was some on the Roe Highway issue.

The media release of 5/2/2003 titled "Roe 8 Threat to Bibra Lake Confirmed" released by the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure stated,

Environmental Protection Authority advice supports the State Government's view that obtaining approvals for Roe Highway Stage 8 would be virtually impossible according to Planning and Infrastructure Minister Alannah MacTiernan.

Ms MacTiernan said the report (no 1088) had underlined the importance of the Beeliar Wetlands (Bibra and North Lakes) to conservation, Aboriginal heritage, recreation and education, by recommending that the road reserve be removed and the area incorporated into the Beeliar Regional Park.

"Roe 8 would bisect these important wetlands and the report makes it clear that this would reduce their environmental value and make long-term management difficult," she said.

"Constructing the highway would involve major clearing and this would remove fauna habitat and breeding areas.

"Dividing the lake system in two poses a serious threat to the viability of the lake's fauna populations and plant species.

"The EPA concluded that it would be extremely difficult for any proposal to construct the highway through the Beeliar Regional Park to be environmentally acceptable.

"It says every effort should be made to avoid this.

"This advice from the EPA only confirms what we have been saying all along, that no government was ever going to be able to build Roe Highway Stage 8 through the wetlands.

"The conservation values of this area are too important to the community.

"This had already been recognised through inclusion of the area as a Bush Forever site under the previous government, as well as its inclusion as an A class reserve in the National Trust's list of Classified Heritage places. "

In a media release dated the same day, "Environment Minister welcomes EPA advice on Roe Highway Stage 8", the Environment Minister also joined the debate. The media release contained many similar comments,

"Environment and Heritage Minister Dr Judy Edwards has welcomed Environmental Protection Authority advice that the construction of Roe Highway Stage 8 would lead to significant environmental impacts for Beeliar Regional Park.

"The report (no. 1088) has confirmed the State Government's view that any road bisecting Bibra and North Lakes should not be built," Dr Edwards said.

"The EPA has provided independent expert advice that the area where the highway was to bisect Beeliar Regional Park is ... 'considered to be of high conservation value and significance due to the ecological linkages it provides and the wetland, vegetation, faunal, ecological, Aboriginal and social values that are represented'."

"The State Government places great value on wetlands remaining on the Swan Coastal Plain, considering that 80 per cent are estimated to have been lost."

"Dr Edwards said the report recommended the road reserve be removed and the area incorporated into the Beeliar Regional Park."

The Minister for Planning and Infrastructure was always keen to put the Government's position in the media when given the chance. In the Cockburn City Herald of May 18, 2002 (page one), the Minister is quoted extensively.

The article by Matt Chambers titled, 'No more Roe', states,

"Roe Highway through Bibra and North Lakes is dead, says WA Planning Minister Alannah MacTiernan. All that is left now is to bury it by deleting the road reserve, she says.

"What has become clear is that there were broad concerns that the Roe on that alignment is not acceptable", she told the Herald last week.

"There is now a commitment to eliminate the Fremantle Eastern Bypass and Roe eight (the stage from the Kwinana Freeway through the lakes)", she says.

"Ms MacTiernan says that except for a few lonely voices there was a clear consensus from all the groups involved that the Roe shouldn't go through the lakes."

Debate on the deletion of the Fremantle Eastern Bypass and the decision not to build Roe Highway Stage 8 raged in the State Parliament virtually as soon as the Labor Government took office. Some of the more interesting moments, with special reference to Roe Highway Stage 8 and the Beelihar Wetlands, are noted below.

**Legislative Council-** QUESTIONS ON NOTICE, Friday, 12 November 2004

**No. 2483.** Hon Jim Scott to the Minister for Local Government and Regional Development representing the Minister for the Environment:

As the Government has stated that it does not intend to build the proposed Roe Highway Stage 8 through the Bibra Lakes wetland system, has the Minister approached the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure to have the road reserve incorporated into the surrounding parks and recreation reserve?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH replied:

The Government has announced its position that it will not be constructing Roe Highway Stage 8 but has not made a decision regarding the future of the road reserve in the vicinity of Bibra Lake.

**Legislative Assembly-** QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE, Wednesday, 23 October 2002

**No. 247.** Mr A.D. McRAE to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

I refer to the Member for Murdoch's pledge yesterday on behalf of the Liberal Party to reinstate the Fremantle eastern bypass and the construction of Roe Highway stage 8 at some future, far off time. Has this dodgy pledge any logic at all and would it contribute in any way to a sensible planning process in the South Metropolitan Region?

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN replied:

.... The Government has commissioned some estimates of the cost of constructing a sustainable, environmentally friendly Roe Highway stage 8. It could be contemplated in two ways: either as a bridge, which would cost \$140 million, or as a tunnel, which would cost \$500 million. Both options are pixie land.

**Legislative Assembly-** QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE, Tuesday, 24 September 2002

**No. 175.** Mr A.D. McRAE to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

Can the Minister advise whether the Government has received support from an unexpected quarter for its proposals on freight planning in the southern metropolitan corridor?

Ms A.J. MacTIERNAN replied:

Hon Simon O'Brien, more recently, has been racing around the southern suburbs being a brave opponent of the Government's paradigm shift, and a great supporter of Roe Highway stage 8 and the Fremantle eastern bypass. However, just a few days before the last election he had a very different perspective, and was by no means an advocate of Roe Highway stage 8. He said -

" I'm not sure, and I'm not convinced, that we need this stage at all. I mean. . . I've got to tell ya, I have difficulty reconciling having a six-lane super highway coming through here, with the environmental situation that we've got here."

**Legislative Assembly- QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE, Tuesday 31 July, 2001**

**No. 361.** Mrs Hodson-Thomas to the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

(1) What is the Government's position in respect to the extension of the Roe Highway through the North Lake and Bibra Lake Bushland?

(2) Does the Minister agree, that as it is currently proposed, the route of this road will have severe environmental impact?

(3) Will the Minister be removing the road reserve from the Metropolitan Region Scheme?

Ms MacTIERNAN replied:

(1)-(2) I have undertaken to initiate a review of the freight network to ensure that freight is moved on the most appropriate and efficient routes, thus meeting the needs of both the community and the industry. The need to extend Roe Highway beyond Kwinana Freeway will be examined as part of this review.

Arrangements are being made for the freight network review to commence later this year and there will be ample opportunity for community input. Unlike the previous Government, the Labor Government has acknowledged the environmental significance of the Beelihar Wetlands and hence our agreement to review the alignment of Roe Highway.

(3) Roe Highway is located within a primary transport corridor that allows for the future provision of a rapid transit railway and a principal shared path for pedestrians and cyclists. The need to remove the reservation for Roe Highway can only be determined, pending the outcomes of the freight review and other necessary planning studies that are currently being undertaken.

As noted earlier, the Freight Network Congress via the multi-criteria analysis, delivered an unambiguous decision on the proposal to build Roe Highway Stage 8 through the Beelihar Wetlands. It rejected all the options to route the Highway through the wetlands. The preconditions set by the Minister for the deletion of the Roe Highway Stage 8 reservation have been met.

## **12. The Labor Government's McRae Option**

Tony McRae MLA, Member for Riverton, became a key player in the Freight Network Review. Tony McRae was charged with facilitating the Local Impacts Committee which examined the alignment of Roe Highway Stage 7 and options for improving the existing road network. The Liberal Party with the Cities of Melville and Canning targeted residential areas around Leach Highway and South Street (both partly in Tony McRae's electorate) with a great deal of misinformation about the perceived advantages of building more highways especially Roe Highway Stage 8 and the Fremantle Eastern Bypass.

Tony McRae, perhaps seeing some light at the end of the tunnel, put forward the Government's position in early 2003. It is edited to focus on the wetlands issue.

**Legislative Assembly- Grievance, Thursday, 27 February 2003**  
**FREIGHT NETWORK REFORM, SOUTH METROPOLITAN REGION**

*Grievance*

**MR A.D. McRAE** (Riverton) [10.13 am]: It will come as no surprise to members on this side of the House to hear that my grievance is about the lack of intellectual and logical consistency on the part of members opposite, particularly the member for Murdoch and some of his colleagues, in their fear campaign on the reform of the freight network in the south metropolitan region. The Western Australian Government has established a process of engaging with the community to change the way the freight network in this State operates. It has developed a process to develop a sustainable freight system that will take the State simply beyond bulldozing and building more roads.

The Government is putting in place a sustainable freight system that does not entail bulldozing high conservation wetlands in the south metropolitan region that have a value to the community unparalleled anywhere else on the Swan coastal plain.

In a media release of 28 May 2003 titled, "McRae moves to block Roe Highway alignment through wetlands", ALP Member for Riverton, Tony McRae, made another strong argument for the deletion of the Roe Stage 8 reservation.

The first paragraph noted that,

" Riverton MLA, Tony McRae has declared he will do everything he can to block any future Government from building Roe Highway through the Beelihar wetlands in Bibra Lakes."

A direct quote from the MLA says, " The Liberal Party/SOS plan for Roe Highway is environmental vandalism and must not be allowed to happen. Their plans to extend Roe Highway west of the Freeway would put bulldozers through the middle of the Beelihar Wetlands. "

As the Fremantle Eastern Bypass was finally deleted from the MRS in 2004, after a tortuous and drawn out process, Tony McRae was able to be expansive in Parliament and put forward another reason for the immediate removal of the Roe Highway Stage 8 reservation.

**Legislative Assembly- Statement, Thursday 23, September 2004,**

*Statement by Member for Riverton*

**MR A.D. McRAE** (Riverton) [12.53 pm]: Today I am releasing a plan for the future development of the road freight network in the southern metropolitan region. It is a plan for the future that demonstrates that a sustainable freight connection is possible. The Gallop Government's program of reform and improvement has been very clearly demonstrated through its work on Roe

Highway. When we came to government in 2001 there had been no progress on Roe Highway for 10 years. We have now completed Roe Highway stage 4 to the Kenwick Link, Roe Highway stage 5 to Nicholson Road and Roe Highway stage 6 to South Street. Roe Highway stage 7 will connect to the Kwinana Freeway by the end of next year.

There has been much debate about what will happen to the old plan for Roe Highway stage 8, which 40 years ago was designed to be bulldozed through the Beeliar wetlands west of the freeway. That old plan is not sustainable. It is no longer acceptable to put a major road like Roe Highway through such valuable wetlands.

My plan is a plan for the future. It sets out a sustainable plan that protects the Beeliar wetlands and connects the freight network. My connect-and-protect plan shows how Roe Highway can be extended along the existing freight rail line to connect to Stock Road in the Spearwood industrial zone. Creating a freight corridor that contains both rail and road freight is good use of built infrastructure. It minimises the impact of freight movement on local communities and protects the wetlands from the bulldozers. This is a plan for the future that can be put in place if and when it is demonstrated that a connection of Roe Highway to Stock Road is necessary.

### **13. Dialogue with the City**

In September 2004 as part of the Dialogue with the City process the State Government launched key findings and directions for future planning in Perth and Peel. They were developed after more than a year of widespread consultation with thousands of Western Australians from a variety of backgrounds.

The final report contained numerous references to wetlands within the Perth region. The Dialogue findings were that wetlands, along with other natural landscapes, define Perth's character and lifestyle and should be restored and protected from development (page 11, 57, 63).

To achieve this the Dialogue wanted,

- The Swan Coastal Plain Wetlands EPP completed
- The Implementation of a buffer policy for wetlands
- To halt and reverse the loss of wetlands already put at 80%

Part A (page 117) of the Dialogue report lists aspects of environmental and or heritage significance that have the highest priority for protection. The Beeliar Wetlands fall under a number of the areas identified,

- Regionally significant bushland recognised in Bush Plan
- Wetlands recognised as a habitat for migratory birds
- Wetlands recognised in the Swan Coastal Plain Wetlands EPP
- Indigenous cultural heritage sites
- On the register of the National Estate

When it comes to the 'conflict' between transport and the environment, the Dialogue gives an indication of how to protect the Beelihar Wetland ecosystem by noting that a planning principle should be, "improving the efficiency and management of the existing transport rather than building more roads." (page 69)

#### **14. Acid Sulphate Soils (ASS)**

The Department of Environment (DoE) released guidelines on dealing with acid sulphate soils in August 2003 (17). The report identified wetlands on the Swan Coastal Plain as areas where acid sulphate soils have formed.

The section on Guiding Principles for Management of Acid Sulphate Soils in the DoE guidelines state,

- Where possible, development projects should avoid soils and sediments exhibiting ASS characteristics
- A precautionary approach should be adopted in the management of ASS

In November 2003 the WA Planning Commission released Bulletin 64, *Acid Sulphate Soils*. The Bulletin identified the Beelihar Wetlands as containing significant areas of both high acid sulphate risk and moderate acid sulphate risk. Importantly, it identified the Roe Highway Stage 8 reserve as crossing two areas of high-risk acid sulphate soil areas.

The State has been forced to address the ASS issue after poor planning and environmental decisions led to a number of environmental and public health crises. Most notable of these was contamination of a housing subdivision in Stirling and closure of the Beenup mineral sands mine in the South-West. Changes to the local hydrology from these developments led to the disturbance and mobilisation of natural acid sulphates in the soil. In the Stirling example the activated acids mobilised heavy metals and arsenic in the soil which contaminated the groundwater. At Beenup, local water used in the mining operations became so acidic from the mobilised acid sulphates that machinery was affected.

The WA Planning Commission Bulletin notes that mobilisation of acid sulphate soils can lead to, among other things,

- Deterioration of ecosystems and associated groundwater and wetlands
- Local and regional loss of biodiversity
- Corrosion of engineering works and infrastructure

It states that the types of developments that may cause acid sulphate problems include,

- Developments involving disturbance to wetlands, mangrove swamps, salt marshes, lakes and waterways
- Infrastructure projects such as bridges, port facilities, flood-gates, railways and roads.

In Appendix 1 of this Bulletin, Principle 2 states, "Disturbance of acid sulphate soils should be avoided wherever possible."

## **15. Swan Coastal Plain Wetlands EPP 2005**

The Swan Coastal Plain Wetlands Environmental Protection Policy is the latest in a number of wetland conservation policies and guidelines developed over the years. It acknowledges the abovementioned 1997 *Wetlands Conservation Policy for Western Australia* as a key document in the progress of protection for wetlands remaining on the Swan Coastal Plain. However, the 1992 Environmental Protection (Swan Coastal Plain Lakes) Policy predates it.

The purpose of the 2005 Swan Coastal Plain Wetlands EPP is to,

- protect the environmental values of the most important Swan Coastal Plain Wetlands as an intrinsic part of the natural hydrology and the surface and groundwater system (including the ecological structure, ecological functions and ecological processes)
- Prevent and control the pollution of and environmental harm to those wetlands

The Beelihar Wetlands are covered by this policy. The Roe Highway Stage 8 reservation dissects these protected wetlands.

Under the 2005 Wetlands Environmental Protection Policy the Beelihar Wetlands are internationally recognised due to the presence of Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA) and China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA) protected birdlife.

The Policy is supported by the EPA Position Statement of November 2004, *Environmental Protection of Wetlands*. It is a general position on wetlands and notes that the EPA seeks to protect the environmental functions and values of wetlands and restore the biological diversity of wetland habitats. It notes wetlands should be used in accordance with the principles of,

- inter-generational equity
- precautionary principle
- wise use concept
- ecosystem management approach (holistic system approach)
- ecologically sustainable development

## **16. State of the Environment Report**

The 1998 State of the Environment Report (18) graded environmental issues into 5 priority groups which indicated the highest priority for government and community action. Among the first priority group was 'maintaining biodiversity' while the second priority grouping contained 'loss of fringing vegetation'. These issues were confirmed again as major environmental concerns in the EPA's State of the Environment Reporting Update Program of 1 July 2005 (19). Under the Inland Waters section of this report 'loss of wetlands' and 'loss and degradation of fringing and instream vegetation' were identified as important concerns.

## 17. Conclusions

Roe Highway Stage 8 was planned more than forty years ago, at a time when the value of the Beelihar Wetlands was not fully understood. It is now recognised that these wetlands have the following important values:

- outstanding biodiversity
- habitat for wildlife, including migratory waders and rare fauna
- Aboriginal cultural and spiritual sites
- Important recreational areas.

Most people and Government planners now recognise that the MRS alignment for Roe Highway stage 8 is not appropriate. The Environmental Protection Authority has stated that no route through the Beelihar Wetlands is likely to be environmentally acceptable. The environmental damage that would result from any attempt to build the Roe Highway between North and Bibra Lakes would far outweigh any benefit the Highway might bring.

As a result of the Freight Network Review, alternative transport routes have been identified and stage 8 of the Roe Highway is now redundant.

The strong body of evidence presented and summarised in this report has been consistent in its findings that this Highway should not be built. The arguments against the construction of Roe Highway Stage 8 have been supported by numerous studies and subsequent government reviews and technical reports. This entire process has withstood public and government scrutiny and proven to be robust.

It is therefore timely and appropriate to delete Stage 8 from the Metropolitan Region Scheme so that it may be incorporated into the Beelihar Regional Park.

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